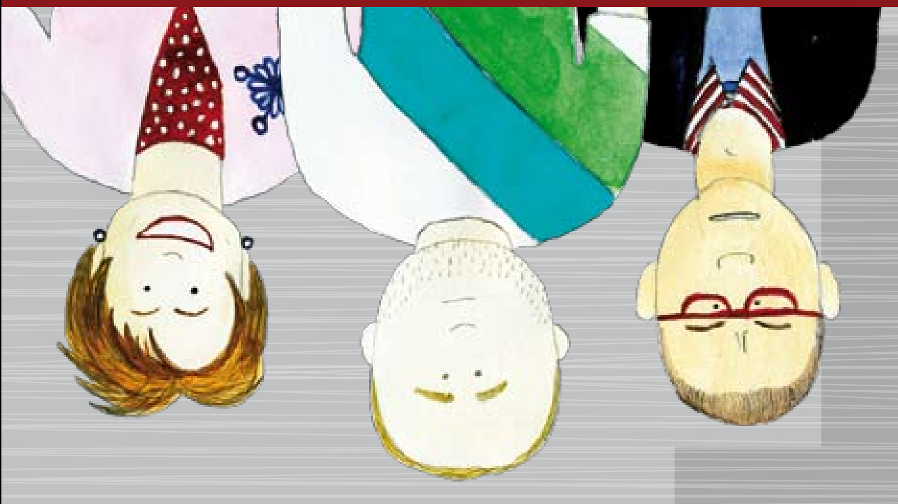


# OVER THE HEDGE

## Attitudes on Civil Society in Belarus and Lithuania



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# OVER THE HEDGE

## Attitudes on Civil Society in Belarus and Lithuania

Eastern Europe Studies Centre

# ATTITUDES ON CIVIL SOCIETY IN BELARUS AND LITHUANIA

The previous issue of the comparative study "Over the Hedge" analysed and compared a number of everyday aspects of living in Lithuania and Belarus ranging from territory and taxes to prices of apples and theatre tickets. The current issue focuses on ways people pursue and defend their interests, responsibility for one's own fate and mutual trust within the society. To be more precise, this issue compares the civil society situation in Belarus and Lithuania.

What does the term "civil society" mean anyway? There are no easy answers to this question as billions of definitions exist. The simplest way to explain this notion is to say that civil society is an area of life where people interact without mediation of the government and on an entirely voluntary basis. Civil society manifests itself primarily when people feel that state institutions do not do enough to solve their problems. Some people feel that state institutions make decisions that aggravate their problems. Meanwhile others merely enjoy being together and helping somebody else. In any case, two conditions are necessary for the civil society to thrive: trust among the citizens and freedom, i. e. existence of a sphere in life that is not controlled by the state.

No extraordinary knowledge of history is needed to realise and understand the similarities and affinity of historical development of Lithuania and Belarus starting from the Middle Ages throughout the 20th century. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that Lithuania, just as

Belarus or other post-communist countries, is no forerunner in Europe in terms of civic activism. Both Lithuania and Belarus share a common experience of Soviet rule marked by suppression of alternative opinions and discouragement of civic activism. The state did not leave any private space back then for people to communicate without its mediation. Hardly anything was "voluntary": school and work were obligatory and so were neighbourhood clean-ups every April, public festivities and other "social" initiatives. Moreover, any initiative was discouraged or even punishable. Institutions of power, such as KGB, were omnipresent, and people lost trust in each other as anyone could double-cross anyone. Lithuanian and Belarusian societies seem to have forgotten during the Soviet period that we can solve many of our problems ourselves without waiting for the government to do so.

However, nearly two decades have passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Lithuania and Belarus have had considerable time to try to shake off these malign traditions. But have we? And is there anything we can learn from each other? Can Lithuanians learn from the civically active people of Belarus, who courageously carry on with their activities regardless of how difficult it sometimes gets? Could the Belarusians learn how useful trusting and acting together can be in everyday life? How willing are we to take control of our lives? Are we "do-ers" or "don't-ers"? Enthusiasts or cynics? Let us compare.

# STARTING POSITIONS: PAMPERED LITHUANIANS AND SUPPRESSED BELARUSIANS?

As mentioned before, one condition is key to the development of civil society: it is freedom for the citizens to solve their problems and defend their interests themselves. Clearly the Lithuanians do stand on much better grounds in these terms than the Belarusians.

- *The Freedom in the World Report 2009 (by Freedom House)*

  *Lithuania – "free". Civil liberties score – 1*[1]*.*

  *Belarus – "not free". Civil liberties score – 6.*

- *The quality of Life index 2010 by the International Living Magazine (Freedom Index)*

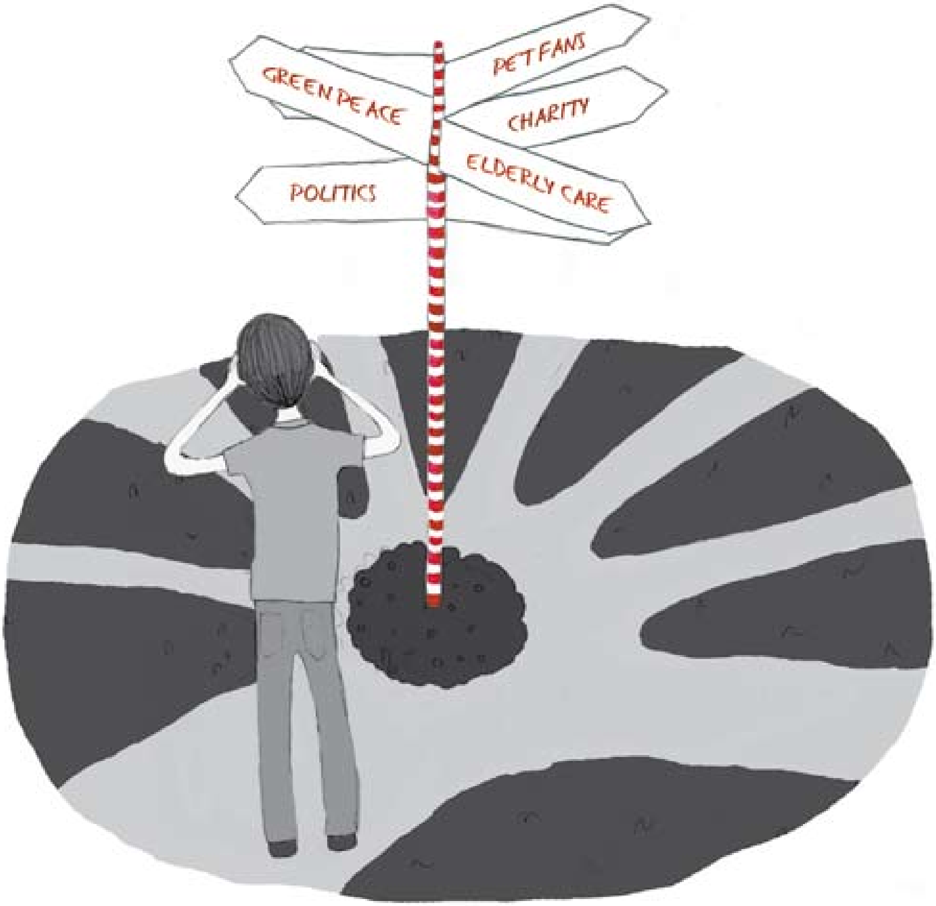
  *Lithuania – 100*[2]*.*

  *Belarus – 8.*

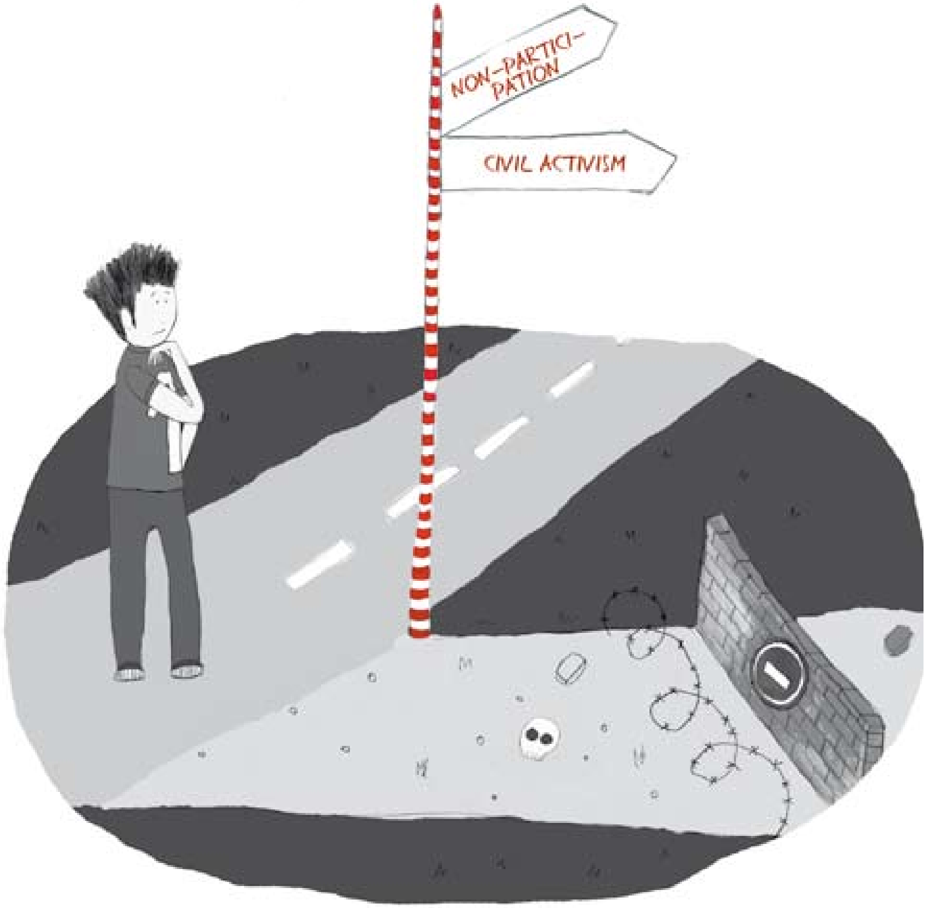
The Belarusians face many limitations in organizing themselves and solving their problems on their own. This is due to the fact that the government is still unwilling to leave the society some space to interact without its control.

There are two important things to bear in mind in this respect. First of all, despite the fact that conditions for taking civic initiative differ radically in Belarus and Lithuania, the

[1] The scores range from 1 (the highest degree of freedom) to 7 (the lowest degree of freedom).
[2] The scores range from 1 (the lowest degree of freedom) to 100 (the highest degree of freedom).

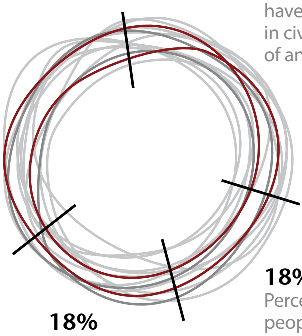



**Lithuanians: having too much to choose from?**




**Belarusians: do not participate or you'll get into trouble**

**Participation in civil society initiatives in 2009, Lithuania**[3]




percentages of people who claim to have participated in civil society initiatives are not dramatically different.

- *An opinion survey conducted in 2009 shows that only 35.2 percent of the Belarusian population had not participated in any form of civil society initiative over the previous 10 years.*
- *This percentage is close to the Lithuanian data: 30 percent of the Lithuanian population refrained from civil society initiatives in 2009.*

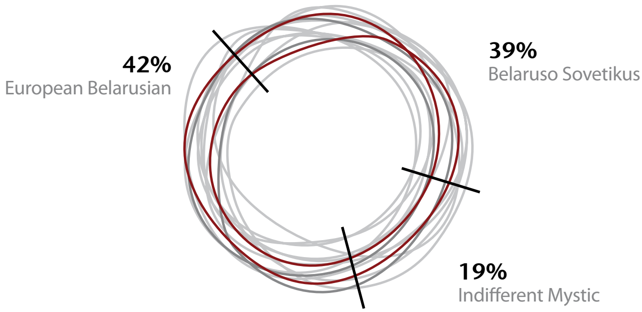
This clearly shows that Lithuanians are not making use of all the opportunities they have to improve their lives. On the other hand, the understanding of what civil society does and why it is useful is different. In many cases civil society in Belarus needs to struggle for a chance to exist rather than act as an efficient self-help tool used to make everyday life better. This has a strong impact on what the civil society does, who the participants of various civic activities are, and what the public attitude on civil activism is.

[3] Civil Society Institute, "Civic Empowerment Index 2009". <http://www.civitas.lt/lt/?pid=74&id=78>

# UNDERSTANDING AND ASSESSING CIVIL SOCIETY IN BELARUS

The Belarusians have had little or no time to develop understanding of civil society. The only period of civic freedom when people could have developed this understanding was less than ten years in between the collapse of the USSR and 1996. Only then did free elections take place in Belarus, freedom of speech was ensured, and independent political as well as public interest organizations could be established. The year 1996 put an end to the period of freedom, and the process of the establishment of authoritarian rule had begun. The understanding and nature of civil society were severely affected by the regime: first, many civil society activities became almost illegal or very strictly controlled; second, being unable to perform normally, civil society initiatives diminished or came to be viewed upon as something useless and therefore not to be trusted; third, the relations between the government and civil society were regarded as rival; finally, although this did not entirely sweep away all civil society potential, it strongly discouraged the people who would be willing to act.

Lack of freedom and tightening government control gave birth to three types of attitudes towards civil society in Belarus. These types




can be classified according to what people think of civic initiative, how much they are willing to be active and make a change in their lives, and how much they trust their fellow citizens, hence the Belaruso Soveticus, the European Belarusian, and the Indifferent Mystic.

# TYPE ONE: BELARUSO SOVETICUS

(38. 6 percent of the population of Belarus)

The term *Belaruso Soveticus* is not meant to be offensive; rather, it describes part of the population which has grown to adjust to the political reality of Belarus and has preserved many principles of their lives from the days of Soviet Belarus on account of the fact that it was easier that way. The Belaruso Soveticus relies strongly on the Soviet times when both work and pleasure were obligatory and were organized by the state, while individual initiative was undesirable.

Belaruso Soveticus has his/her own definitions of the terms related to civil society, self-determination in life and freedom. In theory, civil society is an area of life where people interact independently from the government. To Belaruso Soveticus civil society is a continuation of the government: the government creates civil society, finances it and runs it.



Belaruso Soveticus knows little and is not interested in the realities of the non-governmental sector in Belarus. Therefore, he/she considers that neither President, nor the government interferes with the activities and development of civil society. Interestingly enough, he/she does not think that the government is responsible for the decisions that make civil activism punishable (e.g., expulsion from universities, conflicts with one's employers, etc.).

Belaruso Soveticus is generally passive or only participates in projects initiated by the government. Nothing the government organizes is bad; therefore, to Belaruso Soveticus participation in such activities is a citizen's duty.

Belaruso Soveticus does not believe in voluntary work: one must either be obliged to do something, or get paid to do it. Therefore Belaruso Soveticus believes that in the EU people are more civically active because of the financial benefits such activism ensures.

**Type 1. Belaruso Soveticus**

| Proposition | Agree % |
|---|---|
| Civil society helps the government to implement its goals and objectives. In doing this civil society uses the government's financial resources | 45,6 |
| Civil society is when people engage in solving environmental, economic problems or problems related with motherhood and childcare. Issues like human rights, freedom of media, and transparency of election are to be handled by the government, not by civil society | 43,4 |
| Civil society is useless, harmful and dangerous | 11,4 |
| The government commands civil society | 40,3 |
| The Communist Union of Youth (Komsomol) is an example of civil society activity | 25,8 |
| Belarusian Republican Youth Union is an example of civil society activity | 41,2 |
| Most important civil society activities are children's rights and welfare | 25,7 |
| Neither President, nor the government interferes with the development of civil society | 49,0 |
| People participate in civil society activities in the EU because they get material reimbursement | 48,5 |
| Non-governmental organizations and other bodies of civil society can get financial assistance from Belarusian citizens, Belarusian organizations and the government. International funding is not appropriate or should be controlled by the government | 42,3 |
| Belarusian government always asks the opinion of its citizens. The Belarusian Parliament has been elected by the people | 32,8 |
| Belarus is a free country ("absolutely", "yes, rather than no") | 56,7 |

# TYPE TWO: THE EUROPEAN BELARUSIAN

(41.9 percent of the population of Belarus)



There is a crucial difference between an average EU citizen and Belarusian "Europeans". First of all, European Belarusians are much more passive and tolerant to human rights violations, violations of fundamental freedoms, undemocratic course of elections and limitations of freedom of speech as well as breach of rule of law. They differ, however, from Belaruso Soveticus. "Europeans" have a much better understanding of what civil society is and what it should be. Still, the European Belarusian often tends to see civil society in highly political terms.

European Belarusians want civil society to be self-sufficient and independent from the government. European Belarusians believe that the international support for civil society in Belarus is a positive trend.

The majority of the European Belarusians deem that Belarus cannot be considered a free country. They have nevertheless adjusted themselves to the system to a certain degree. Some of them consider themselves individually free: practicing one's religion is not forbidden in Belarus; nor is participation in sports clubs and state-supported humanitarian, youth and ecology organizations and movements.

The European Belarusian considers civil society to be a positive phenomenon: civil society contributes to making life more comfortable and the government more accountable.

The European Belarusians tend to think that the Belarusian government blocks the development of civil society. In the opinion of the European Belarusian, one of most obvious cases of the government's interference with civil society development is the undemocratic course of elections. The European Belarusian is critical towards the vertical concentration of power in Belarus, as it is exclusive to ordinary people and only works for its own benefit.

### Type 2. The European Belarusian

| Proposition | Agree % |
|---|---|
| Civil society is when citizens unite on voluntary grounds to pursue activities they consider to be interesting, important, and valuable. They do it for their own money | 49,3 |
| Civil society is a highly positive or positive phenomenon | 58,4 |
| Civil society is self-sufficient and independent | 38,2 |
| Values are at the heart of civil society | 43,1 |
| Civil society is underdeveloped in Belarus because of the harsh restrictions imposed by the authoritarian regime | 23,1 |
| Non-governmental organizations can receive financial assistance from any citizen, organization and government, including international funding | 52,0 |
| Organizing free and democratic elections is the most important support for civil society the government could pursue | 59,1 |
| EU citizens actively participate in activities of various non-governmental organizations because they trust the government, which provides proper and comfortable conditions. They take the initiative into their own hands | 36,8 |
| The Belarusian government ignores its people because it blocks the development of civil society | 33,4 |
| Belarusian "vertical" of power only works to pursue its own interests. The Belarusian government has isolated itself from its people | 36,2 |
| Belarus is a free country (answers "no" and "no, rather than yes") | 31,2 |

# TYPE THREE: THE INDIFFERENT MYSTIC

(19.4 percent of the population of Belarus)




The Indifferent Mystic differs from both Belaruso Soveticus and the European Belarusian in that the former have no vision of the future at all. Belaruso Soveticus believes in the righteousness of the decisions made by the government, whereas the European Belarusian believes in democracy and freedom. The Indifferent Mystic only believes in the power of money and global conspiracy. The Mystics are often attracted to fatalism and mysticism suggesting that external actors control most of the political life and global financial resources (free masonry, transnational corporations, intelligence institutions, etc.).

The Indifferent Mystics hardly ever take positions on any popular questions. They stay out of public discussions, politics, and analysis and, for the most part, real life.

The Indifferent Mystic refers to the part of the Belarusian society comprised of people who have never participated in any form of civil society activities. They have also always refused to participate in various movements supported by the government. The Indifferent Mystics are equally indifferent to both the government and the civil society.

Indifferent Mystics live according to the principles "Leave me alone", "I do not need anyone", "Everybody around steals and one can trust no one". They refuse to donate money for civil initiatives and consider voluntary activities a waste of time. It is not only civil society initiatives they ignore, but also elections (presuming there will be fraud anyway).

**Type 3. The Indifferent Mystic**

| Proposition | Agree % |
|---|---|
| Civil society is the political opposition. People go to demonstrations in order to take the place of those in power | 11,1 |
| Civil society is generally helpless | 10,1 |
| Civil society is controlled by the ones who provide the money | 18,3 |
| Money lies at the heart of civic activism | 25,7 |
| Civil society has no effect on the welfare and quality of living in Belarus | 19,8 |
| Nothing stands in the way of the development of civil society | 6,0 |
| I have not participated or donated to civil society activities | 35,2 |
| I will not donate to civil society activities | 14,0 |
| If civil society were developed in Belarus my life would stay unchanged | 34,2 |

# UNDERSTANDING AND ASSESSING CIVIL SOCIETY IN LITHUANIA

In the European context Lithuania is no forerunner in terms of civic activism. Generally, although the conditions for civil society in Lithuania have been favorable for 20 years already, the people remain passive. There are, however, important differences from Belarus that stem from the fact that Lithuanians do not only enjoy civil freedoms; they also have their political rights defended. People consider involvement in politics to be more efficient promoting changes of a scale larger than civic initiative. When asked to name the most efficient means to change their situation, Lithuanians rank voting above any other means of activism.

**Most effective means to foster change in the political life of the state**[4]

| Proposition | Agree % |
|---|---|
| Voting | 60 |
| Peaceful demonstrations | 38 |
| Joining NGOs, political parties and organizing communities | 29 |
| Suggesting legislation projects to the state institutions | 28 |
| Filing complaints about the decisions made by state institutions | 27 |
| Signing petitions | 19 |
| Demanding a referendum | 17 |
| Participation in the preparation of municipalities program and positions of responsibility in the civil service | 16 |
| Initiating new law in the Parliament | 11 |
| Running for the Parliament, municipality posts and president | 9 |

[4] The attitudes of Lithuanian population towards non-governmental organizations. Preconditions of passivity. 2009 08. RAIT Ltd. <http://www.jauniejiteisininkai.lt/attachments/File/Nacionalinis_projektas/LTD_sociologinis_tyrimas.pdf>.

On the other hand, Lithuanians claim that organizing and joining forces gives one much more power to control one's fate than individual efforts.

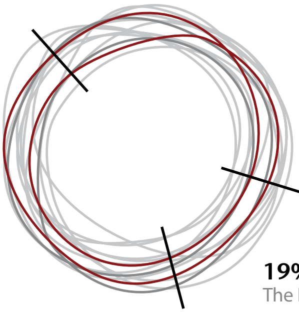
| Proposition[5] | Agree % | Disagree % |
|---|---|---|
| Citizens in Lithuania can effectively influence decisions made at the municipality level if they organize themselves | 69 | 5 |
| Citizens in Lithuania can effectively influence decisions made at the state level if they organize themselves | 62 | 7 |
| Citizens in Lithuania can effectively influence decisions made at the state level individually | 12 | 55 |

Another interesting characteristic of attitudes on civil society in Lithuania is the fact that civic activism is viewed predominantly as a means for solving local problems.

**Would you initiate/join civil society initiative if a problem occurred…[5]**

| Type of problem | I would initiate action | I would join action |
|---|---|---|
| Local problem | 29 % | 47 % |
| Economic problem at the national level | 13 % | 45 % |
| Political problem at the national level | 4 % | 44 % |

[5] Civil Society Institute, "Civic Empowerment Index 2009". <http://www.civitas.lt/lt/?pid=74&id=78>

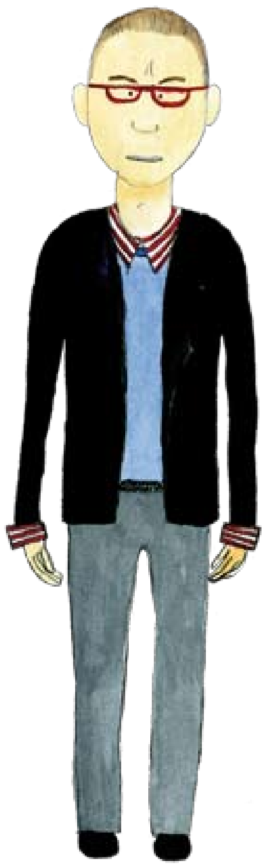



Therefore, the main characteristic differentiating the types of peoples' attitude towards civil society in Lithuania is the life style and/or socioeconomic situation. Those who care about solving local problems are more active.

There are three types that describe the portrait of citizens' opinion toward civil society activism: the Skeptical Big City Dweller, the "Small-change-matters" Family-person and the Low-income Pessimist.

# TYPE ONE: THE SKEPTICAL CITY DWELLER

(40.9 percent of population of Lithuania)



The Skeptic is well informed about what civil society is and how it functions. He/she describes non-governmental organizations as organizations independent from the government, non-profit organizations, social movements and organizations that are not financed by the state. According to the Skeptic, NGOs have the following functions: charitable activities and active representation of societal interests.

The Skeptic also has a solid position on what the main problems impeding successful development of civil society are. Skeptics usually have liberal views on the development of civil society and emphasize that it is not so much little government support, as lack of private business support and low leadership capabilities of civil society organizations that are among the main factors impeding their successful activities.

The category "The Skeptical Big City dweller" in fact covers a broader range of people than those residing in larger cities of Lithuania, as people from smaller towns also often fall within this category. However, the concept "living a busy city life" is part of the person's self-perception as most of his/her activities are centred around the career. This person is usually educated (has university-level education) and often works in civil service or business. Single city dwellers in their 20s, 30s and 40s often fall within this category.

Despite rich knowledge of civil society, the Skeptic usually does not participate in civil society activities or chooses forms of participation that are less time consuming, e.g. donating 2 percent of his/her income tax, telephone donations or donations that are made by buying certain products. His/her passivity is usually explained by being preoccupied with his/her own career and critical attitude toward the capabilities of the existing civil society organizations.

**Type 1. The Skeptical City Dweller**

| Proposition | Agree % |
|---|---|
| An NGO is an organization independent from the government, a non-profit organization, a social movement or organization that is not financed by the state | 26 |
| What NGOs do: charitable activities, active representation of societal interests | 41.5 |
| Major problems that civil society faces in Lithuania: lack of business and private (individual) citizen donations, too few volunteers, passive leadership | 30 |
| Most appropriate forms of involvement in civil society activities: donating 2 percent of their income tax, donating money (average of 20 US dollars per donation) | 48 |
| Reasons for not participating in civil society initiatives: do not have the time, do not feel qualified enough, it is difficult to find people with the same beliefs, do not trust any of the NGOs they know | 47 |
| What type of civil society initiative would you like to participate in: hobby communities (sports, fishermen, etc.), a group of people of certain social group and interest (students, mother unions, etc.)? | 45 |
| Successful operation of an NGO depends on good leadership more than on good financing | 66 |
| Legal regulation in Lithuania does not promote civil society activities substantially | 64 |
| What would encourage/encourages you to participate in civil society initiatives: self-realization, additional social benefits, limited time needed to participate (no more than 4 hours per week), if NGO activities were made public/could be added to CV? | 12 |

# TYPE TWO: THE "SMALL- CHANGE-MATTERS" FAMILY PERSON

(40.5 percent of the population of Lithuania)



They consider that an NGO is a voluntary organization or group of volunteers acting to increase the well-being of the society through self-help and provision of certain social services (such as care for the homeless children and the elderly). These people are often the "do-ers": they organize and participate in neighbourhood clean-ups, cultural evenings for local communities, charity collection actions and etc. However, though willing to be active, quite a share of these people expect an invitation to join civic activities and feel discouraged to show the initiative themselves for fear of failure or of being looked upon as "strangers" by the local community.

This group comprises a diverse group of people: from educated family people living in cities, smaller towns and villages, to teachers and community leaders, students and youth. What unites these people is their willingness to solve their local problems actively and shared sympathy towards vulnerable groups of the society.

They are also more critical on the government's role in supporting civil society initiatives. They often refer to legal regulations of starting an activity as too complicated and mention lack of financial assistance from the state.

### Type 2. The "Small-change-matters" Family Person

| Proposition | Agree % |
|---|---|
| An NGO is an independent organization, a voluntary organization or group of volunteers sharing common interests and acting to improve the well-being of the society. NGOs deal with charitable activities | 12 |
| What NGOs do: provide certain services, act as self-help groups, coordinate certain resources | 28.7 |
| Major problems civil society faces in Lithuania: lack of government funding, negative attitude of state officials, imperfection of law regulating their activities, lack of experience | 40 |
| Most appropriate forms of involvement in civil society activities: volunteering in specific initiatives, joining an already-established NGO , establishing a new NGO | 36 |
| Reasons for non-participation in civil society initiatives: no one offered joining an initiative, do not know how to start, cannot afford participating without financial reimbursement | 50 |
| What type of civil society initiative would you like to participate in: organization that takes care of homeless and ill children, local (town or district, village) communities, elderly care initiatives? | 47 |
| NGOs could become efficient partners to the government in supplying public services and providing representation of various public interests | 59 |
| Lithuanian citizens can effectively influence decisions made at the municipality level if they organize themselves | 69 |
| What would encourage/encourages you to participate in civil society initiatives: possibility to earn additional money, personal invitation to join? | 23 |

# TYPE THREE: THE LOW-INCOME PESSIMIST

(18.6 percent of the population of Lithuania)



The Low-income Pessimist is similar to the Belarusian Indifferent Mystic. He/she is critical of many things (including civil society) because of lack of information and general skepticism to anything that is new. He/she also refuses to look for information or assistance because of general disappointment in life. His/hers skepticism is not exclusive to civic initiative. He/she is also a hardliner critic of the government, youth, mass culture and all kinds of elites. Low-income Pessimists generally consider themselves to be helpless in the society and often mock civil initiatives or deem them to be purely money-driven.

The Low-income Pessimist usually suffers from some kind of social exclusion: he/she might be an old age pensioner, an unemployed person, living from social benefits or living in a small village among an elderly community.

**Type 3. The Low-income Pessimist**

| Proposition | Agree % |
|---|---|
| I do not know what an NGO is | 53 |
| I do not know what the functions of an NGO are | 10 |
| Major problems civil society faces in Lithuania: lack of information about their activities | 17 |
| Does not want to get involved in any civil society activities | 27 |
| Reasons for non-participation in civil society initiatives: there is no point in participating | 13 |
| What type of civil society initiative would you like to participate in? -None | 10 |
| NGOs are not important, the state can execute most of their functions | 25 |
| Lithuanian citizens cannot effectively influence decisions made at the municipality level even if they organize themselves | 5 |
| Lithuanian citizens cannot effectively influence decisions made at the state level even if they organize themselves | 7 |
| What would encourage/encourages you to participate in civil society initiatives? - Nothing | 19 |

# MAKING SENSE OF THE SIX TYPES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ASSESSMENTS

- *The present research reveals that Lithuanian and Belarusian societies are similar. Unexpectedly, the most obvious difference between Belarusian and Lithuanian attitudes on civil society is in levels of support for civic initiative. In general, the Belarusians are more skeptical about civic initiative (around 58 percent of the population), whereas 81 percent of Lithuanians support it. One could have expected government policies to impede civil society development the most, yet hardly the overall public to be skeptical. Public opinion will change, however, as soon as the quality of civic initiatives has improved.*
- *Despite this skepticism, Belarusian potential for civic activism is relatively high (around 65 percent of the population have expressed willingness to join a civil society initiative in the future). This is quite an encouraging number taking into consideration the difficult conditions NGOs face in Belarus.*

Truly important is the fact that a significant number of people are willing to stand up for their rights: 10,9 percent of the respondents would like to work with human rights issues and 8,5 percent want to struggle for freedom of speech. These nearly 20 percent of the population will be making room for further civil society development in Belarus in the future.

**What type of civil society initiative would you like to participate in? - Belarus**

| Type of activity/NGO | % |
|---|---|
| Humanitarian aid | 15,7 |
| Human rights defense | 10,9 |
| Freedom of speech | 8,5 |
| Economic education | 6,2 |
| Environmental problems | 14,7 |
| Promotion of national speech and culture | 7,5 |
| Protection of interests of entrepreneurs | 6,2 |
| Women rights | 9,5 |
| Sports organizations | 8,2 |
| Fishermen and nature hobbyists | 6,4 |
| Autosports hobbyist | 8,3 |
| Nationalist movements | 1,7 |
| Local communities | 4,4 |
| Art and Culture | 10,8 |
| Travelers associations | 17,8 |
| Religion | 13,0 |
| Other | 0,7 |
| None | 35,2 |

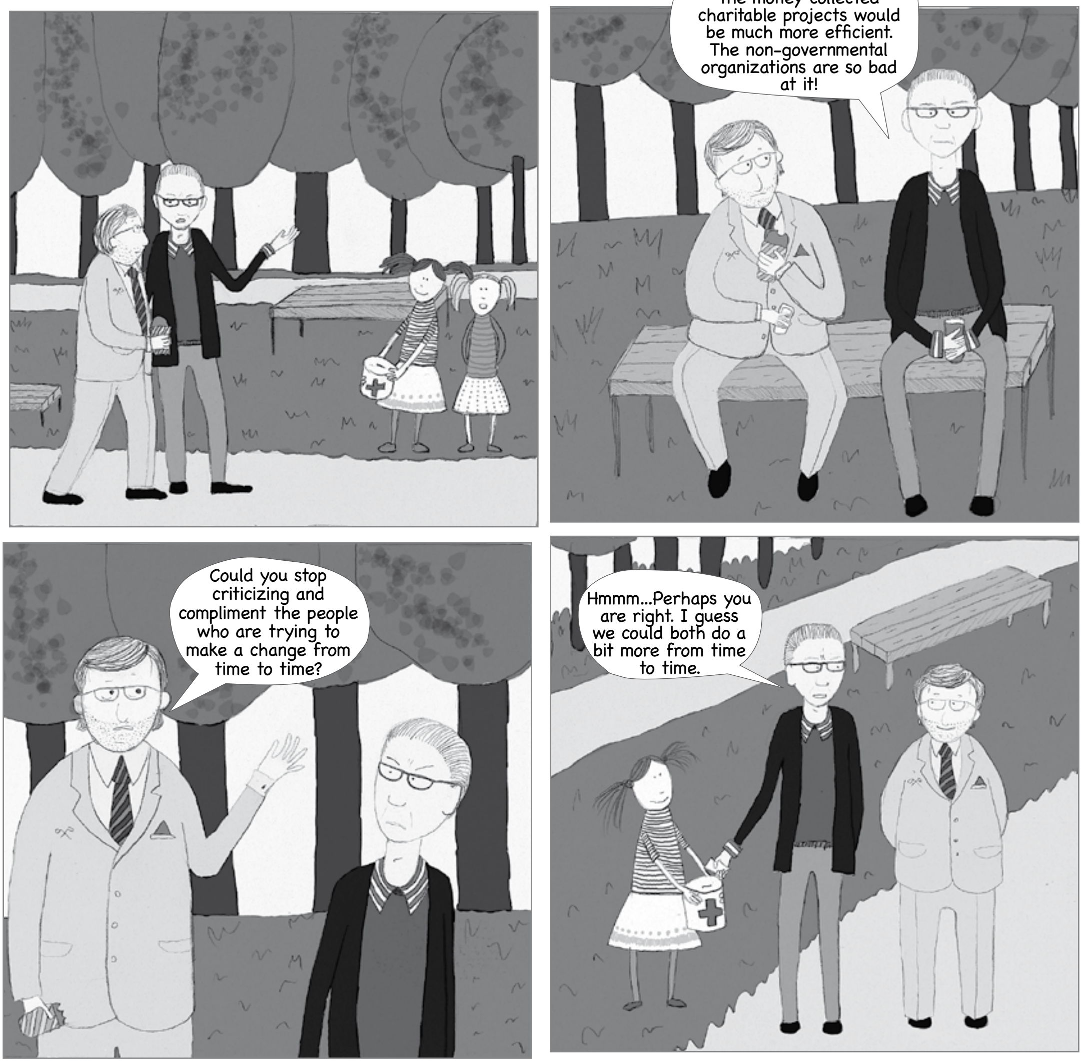
■ *Only 10 percent of Lithuanian population say they do not want to participate in any type of civil society activities in the future. This has a lot to do with the financial crisis of 2008-2009. Nevertheless research shows that the financial crisis has not affected levels of civic activism, but in fact encouraged it. Could the crisis become a breakthrough moment for the growth of Lithuanian civil society? It could at least be a good reminder for people on both sides of the hedge: times of trouble are actually the times when solidarity and activity are needed the most.*

**What type of civil society initiative would you like to participate in? - Lithuania**

| Type of activity /NGO | % |
|---|---|
| Hobby-oriented associations (sports, arts and crafts, fishermen, etc.) | 27 |
| Childcare | 24 |
| Organization defending interests of a certain social group (students association, disabled persons, old-age pensioners, mothers, etc.) | 18 |
| Helping socially vulnerable groups of the local community | 12 |
| Defending interests of the local community | 12 |
| Work with disabled persons | 9 |
| Environmental problems | 9 |
| Care for elderly persons | 8 |
| Other | 6 |
| None | 10 |

# INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION:

**A European Belarusian and a Lithuanian Skeptical City Dweller meet two schoolchildren collecting charity on their walk in the park.**



**After reading the latest “Over the Hedge” issue.**



**Two neighbors accidentally meet at the dilapidated stairwell of their apartment building.**

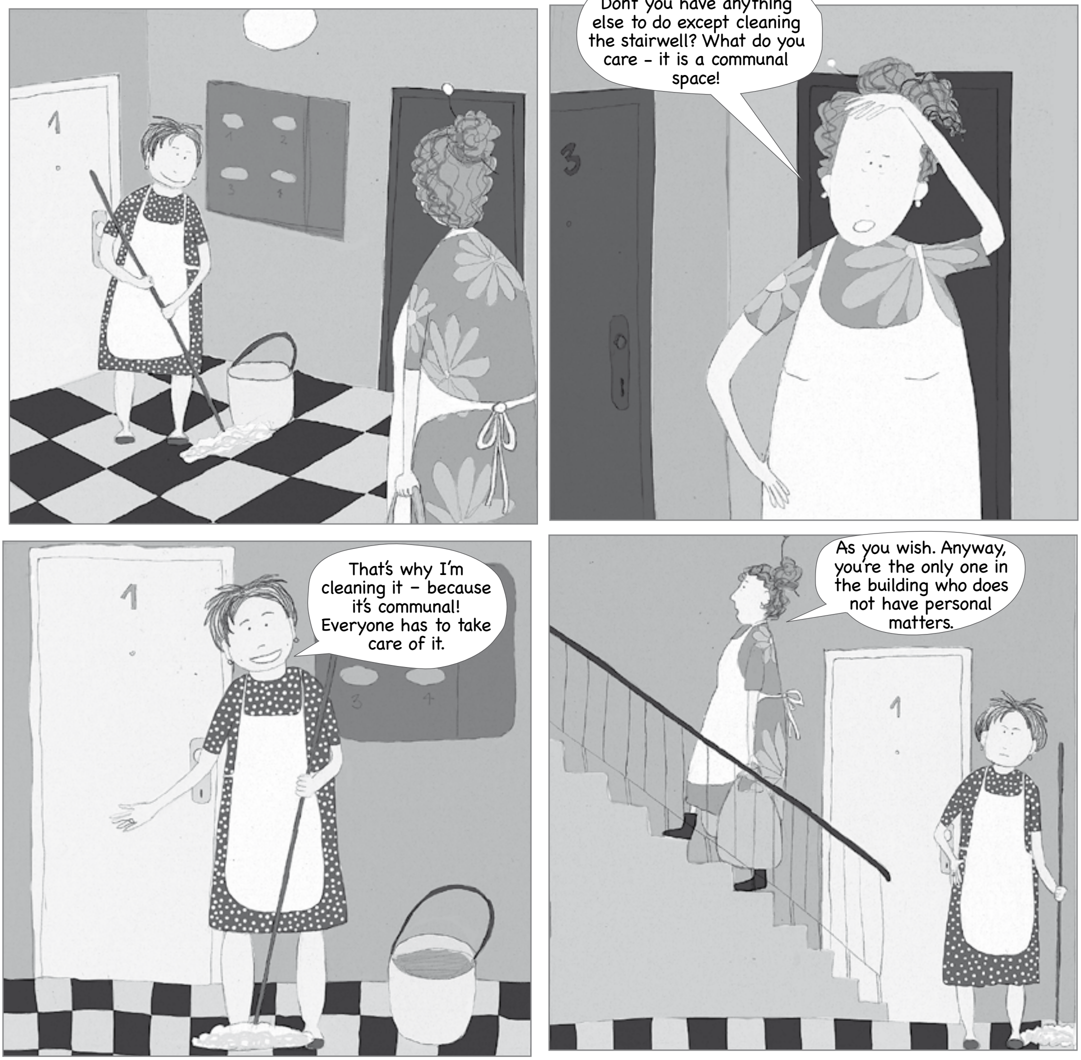



A European Belarusian and Lithuanian Low-income Pessimist are having a discussion at the map of Lithuania and Belarus.
Lithuanians should be thankful to Belarusians for their independence in 1918. Lithuania was able to struggle free only with the help of Belarusians who had fought on their side.
I am not sure that teaching history at schools reflects what really happened centuries ago.
Sigh! You remind me of my cousin the Belarusian Mystic so much!

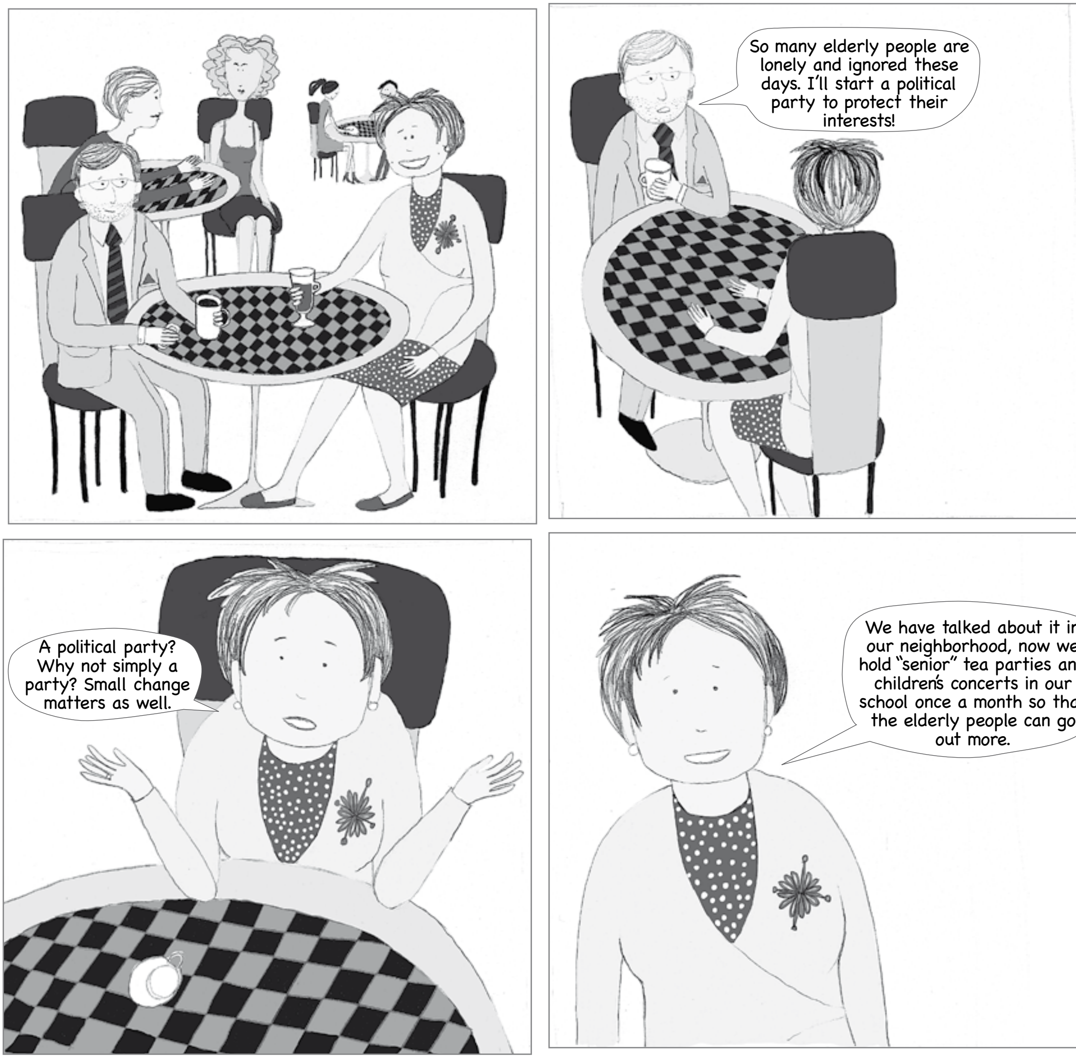
**A Belaruso Soveticus and a Lithuanian Skeptical City Dweller are at a family dinner.**



**A Lithuanian family person is washing the stairs as Belaruso Soveticus returns from the grocery's with a shopping bag.**



**A European Belarusian and a Lithuanian Family Person are having coffee.**



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